

services under the Medicare Program. Our Michigan families get wonderful care from wonderful doctors. Our American families receive wonderful care from wonderful doctors. But the question is, Will they be able to continue to receive those services? I would argue, not unless we do something now about the payment system used to reimburse physicians for Medicare services.

Beginning January 1, 2007, the Medicare sustainable growth rate formula will cut payments to physicians and health care professionals by 5.1 percent. What does that mean in real dollars? In Michigan alone, it is \$137 million in cuts to Medicare. The average cut for a physician in Michigan will be \$34,000. As medical costs go up—as we see the cost of sustaining an office and other costs and medicine going up, everything is going up—we are cutting back on the physicians' reimbursements. These cuts will be particularly devastating for primary care doctors, the very doctors, according to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, MedPAC, many Medicare beneficiaries rely on for important health care management.

Again, we are scheduled to adjourn in 7 days. It is time to resolve this issue so that our physicians know they are going to be able to continue to care for Medicare patients come January.

This is not a new issue. MedPAC considers the Medicare SGR formula a flawed, inequitable mechanism for controlling the volume of services and first recommended repeal of the Medicare SGR formula in 2001. Since then, they have consistently recommended repealing the formula. I have, in fact, put forward a bill that would do that and set up a physicians commission to recommend what should be done. We don't have time for that between now and the end of the year, but we do have time to do what needs to be done in the next 7 days, which is to stop the cut that is scheduled to take effect in January. We need to stop that, and instead of a freeze that was given last year, we need to give a modest update for our physicians so they will know that we understand how important their services are to seniors and people with disabilities.

In conclusion, I wish to share a couple of letters I have received. I have received so many letters from physicians around Michigan expressing grave concern. These are people who care very much about the people they serve. They are trying to keep it together so they can continue to serve people, whether it is in Detroit, Lansing, or Grand Rapids, up north, in the upper peninsula.

I received a letter from a physician in Cheboygan, MI, which is a small town on the lower tip of the northern peninsula. Timothy M. Burandt, D.O. in surgery, wrote me a letter that says:

In 1982, I graduated from medical school and took an oath to care for all patients in need. As a general surgeon practicing in

rural northern Michigan, I am committed to caring for all of my neighbors, not just those with insurance.

My expenses keep going up as I also have a responsibility to my staff to support them with fair wages and benefits.

Without adequate reimbursement, I cannot continue to offer my services to everyone who walks through my door. There simply aren't enough resources. Please don't force me to choose which patients I should care for. I would rather retire early and close the practice.

I don't want Dr. Burandt to have to close his practice in Cheboygan, MI. The families in Cheboygan, MI, cannot afford for him to close his practice, and there is no excuse for us not to act so he doesn't have to.

Also, Tara Eding, a doctor of internal medicine in Hamilton, MI, writes:

It will be very difficult to remain in practice as internist. The majority of my practice (including 3 other partners) is made up of Medicare patients. It is already difficult to maintain a primary care practice in this field. We have recently had to "trim" overhead by cutting staff, restricting our services, etc. and I only see things getting worse. If these cuts are made it will drive us out of practice.

I have already stopped accepting new Medicare patients and if these cuts go through I will not have a choice. I will be forced to stop participating in one way or another. We would not be able to keep our practice open as it exists today.

There is a sense of urgency in these letters. There is a sense of urgency that we need to feel on the floor of the Senate. We have 80 people in this body on both sides of the aisle who have called on our leaders to act. We have a sound policy, we have a sense of urgency, and we have time to get this done in the next few days.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1547

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Finance Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 1574, a bill to provide for a minimum update for physician services under Medicare, and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the amendment at the desk to strike the language pertaining to an update for 2006 be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be read three times, passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, without intervening action or debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAIG. It is necessary that we object. The Senator from Michigan makes a tremendously valuable point. I hope the Senate does the right thing after we come back from the recess for the elections in November to deal with this critical issue which deals with our doctors and Medicare, but at this moment in time, I have to object to proceeding.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

The minority time for morning business has expired.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Colorado.

## HONORING THE GOLD STAR AND BLUE STAR MOTHERS

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, 70 years ago, Congress passed a resolution proclaiming that the last Sunday in September be designated as Gold Star Mother's Day. As we approach the last Sunday in September, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the Gold Star mothers throughout the country and particularly those in the State of Colorado.

I hope we will all take time this Sunday, September 24, to honor these mothers and fathers who have so bravely endured the loss of a son or daughter killed while serving in the Armed Forces. Colorado has lost many young men and women to combat since the horrendous attacks of 9/11. One day is not long enough for us to ever fully honor these parents who have had to suffer the unmanageable pain of losing a child, but we will try.

Across the State of Colorado and across the Nation, many of these mothers have come together not only for support but also to volunteer their time, serving veterans and families of soldiers, encouraging patriotism and national pride, and honor their children through service and allegiance to the United States. Through their volunteer efforts, they keep alive the memory and spirit of those whose lives were lost in the war. They continue to inspire compassion, strength, and faithfulness for all Americans.

To mark this weekend, the Blue Star mothers of Colorado will be hosting Colorado's first annual Gold Star Mother's Day weekend. There will be several events throughout the weekend celebrating the lives of those soldiers who so courageously gave the ultimate sacrifice for their Nation. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend the ceremony myself, but my wife Joan and I send our thoughts and prayers to those who will be attending the event.

Words truly cannot express America's gratitude for our Armed Forces and their service and sacrifice to this Nation. Those who have fallen serve a cause greater than themselves and deserve special honor. To their mothers and fathers: You, too, deserve special honor as you continue to carry on the patriotic duties and legacy your sons and daughters sadly could not. I thank you for your courage and for your service to the United States of America.

Over the last 3 years, our Nation has been locked in a terrible struggle against radical extremists across the Middle East. I readily admit this fight is one we did not anticipate. But I do know that every life given in the name of freedom has not been given in vain.

While they continually experience many dangerous challenges, our men and women of our Armed Forces continue making strides in Iraq and Afghanistan. We have fought a terrible enemy that has no regard for human life. Yet despite our challenges, we have seen tremendous progress, especially toward helping to create partners in our fight against terrorism

worldwide. Indeed, much of our success depends on the men and women in the new democratic governments formed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and they are stepping up to the challenge. In Iraq, people from all walks of life—Sunnis, Shias, Kurds—have participated in multiple elections and referendums across the country for the first time in Iraq's history.

Remarkably, after democratic elections in Afghanistan, women are holding positions of power in local and national governments, something that was impossible under the Taliban's rule. The sovereign governments are working with regional and international partners in achieving united democracies—an achievement only allowed through our fighting men and women in combat.

Many remarkable achievements have been made through the sacrifices of the men and women in the military, but perhaps the most important of all is what has not occurred in our country: since we took military action against these Islamic extremists and brought the fight to them, we have not seen an attack on American soil. The sacrifices that the sons and daughters of our Gold Star mothers have made and continue to make are protecting us on our shores. Unfortunately, we have seen that even after the death of terrorist leaders, such as Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the forces of Islamic extremists vow that they will continue to wage war on American civilians. Our success against this type of enemy is only ensured by the brave men and women of our Armed Forces. They provide safety and security to our Nation, and we are truly grateful for what they have done.

While the cost has been high, the cost of doing nothing would be even greater. These words provide little comfort to the families who have lost loved ones, but we will always remember those who have lost their lives in support of our freedom and thank them for their sacrifice.

I ask unanimous consent that a list of fallen heroes from Colorado be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Pfc. Travis W. Anderson  
Pfc. Shawn M. Atkins  
Staff Sgt. Daniel A. Bader  
Sgt. Douglas E. Bascom  
Sgt. Thomas F. Broomhead  
Petty Officer 2nd Class Danny P. Dietz  
Lance Cpl. Mark E. Engel  
Staff Sgt. Christopher M. Falkel  
Pfc. George R. Geer  
Lance Cpl. Evenor C. Herrera  
Cpl. Benjamin D. Hoeffner  
Staff Sgt. Theodore S. Holder II  
Maj. Douglas A. La Bouff  
Staff Sgt. Mark A. Lawton  
Spec. Derrick J. Lutters  
Pfc. Tyler R. MacKenzie  
Lance Cpl. Chad B. Maynard  
Sgt. Dimitri Muscat  
Sgt. Larry W. Pankey Jr.  
Staff Sgt. Michael C. Parrott  
Pfc. Chance R. Phelps

Pfc. Ryan E. Reed  
Sgt. 1st Class Randall S. Rehn  
Staff Sgt. Gavin B. Reinke  
Sgt. Luis R. Reyes  
Pfc. Andrew G. Riedel  
Capt. Russell B. Rippetoe  
Pfc. Henry C. Risner  
Sgt. 1st Class Daniel A. Romero  
Lance Cpl. Gregory P. Rund  
Staff Sgt. Barry Sanford  
Staff Sgt. Michael B. Shackelford  
Cpl. Christopher F. Sittin  
Lance Cpl. Thomas J. Slocum  
Lance Cpl. Jeremy P. Tamburello  
Staff Sgt. Justin L. Vasquez  
2nd Lt. John S. Vaughan  
Capt. Ian P. Weikel  
Spec. Dana N. Wilson  
Sgt. Michael E. Yashinski

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, in remembering their lives, we also honor and celebrate the joy they brought to their families. To the Gold Star and Blue Star mothers and fathers: I salute you and thank you for your service to this Nation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, how much time remains in morning business for our side?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is 9 minutes 20 seconds remaining.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, first, I wish to recognize the Senator from Colorado for the speech he has just delivered. As chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Gold Star mothers are always at our committee working with us to ensure that those who survived and are America's veterans are treated fairly and justly and the benefits they have been provided by law are delivered to them.

I thank the Senator from Colorado for his recognition of these phenomenal mothers and fathers who have borne the ultimate sacrifice of losing one of their loved ones, one of their children in pursuit of our freedom and justice around the world.

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Idaho. We truly appreciate his leadership on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. He is doing a great job.

Mr. CRAIG. I thank the Senator.

#### DRILLING FOR AMERICA'S OIL

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk to our colleagues about something going on in America at this very moment that probably is very pleasing to the average consumer. I came to the floor of the Senate over a month ago to deliver a speech using this map. I called it the "No-Zone Speech." I called it the "No-Zone Speech" because all of these red areas around our Nation, off our shores, in the Outer Continental Shelf, are no-zones to oil exploration and development. Why? Because we have said politically we don't want to go there. Yet it is believed by the U.S. Geological Survey that in the no-zone rests maybe 80 billion or 90 billion barrels of oil.

I gave that speech in late July of this year at a time when we were debating a very small area down here that could supply upwards of 3 billion or 4 billion barrels of oil, known as lease sale 181. The Senate finally got it, worked out their differences, and passed that legislation. They are now working with the House to try to resolve those differences.

But something phenomenal has happened at the gas pump. During the time I delivered that speech, the Senate was working on lease sale 181, and American consumers were paying over \$3 a gallon for their gas. What happened? If you went to the pump yesterday in certain parts of our country, you paid less than \$2 a gallon, and in my State of Idaho you are paying 30 cents or 40 cents less a gallon than you did in late July or early August. What happened?

Let me tell my colleagues what we think happened. It is about the very reality of America developing its oil reserves and becoming less dependent upon foreign, unstable sources.

About a month ago, Chevron announced they had discovered in the gulf in what is known as deepwater areas 20,000 feet below the ocean's surface, and 8,000 feet below the ocean's floor, possibly one of the largest oil find discoveries in the history of the United States. That announcement, coupled with the fact that there had been no hurricanes in this area, coupled with the fact that all of the oil development and refinement that was taken off line by Katrina is now back on line and operating, and the reality that there was a new reserve of oil that was secure to our Nation and not dependent upon a foreign unstable political power, changed the dynamics of the oil market.

The \$70-plus a barrel for crude that refiners were paying in late July was always believed by many of us who study the market to have \$20 of the \$70 as purely risk money and speculative price. That is gone. That is gone because of this very large discovery down in the gulf and the reality that the Congress is going to act responsibly for the first time and allow some development, some exploration in the no-zone.

To think we could become increasingly independent of unstable foreign sources of oil would be phenomenally important for this country and our economy and, most importantly, for the consumer. I am quite sure that the person who pulls up to the gas pump in Mid City USA today and is paying 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 80 cents to a dollar less than they paid a month ago is a pretty happy person, and they ought to be. But, more importantly, they ought to be recognizing what they should be asking the Congress of the United States to do, and that is to advance the development of drilling in the no-zone.

The Presiding Officer is a Senator from Alaska. She and I and others have worked for years to develop the rest of the oil reserves in Alaska in the ANWR